



Match-fixing

Manipulation of matches and the gambling market

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English summary of Brå report 2015:18



**The Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention (Brå) –
centre for knowledge about crime and crime prevention measures**

The Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention (Brå)
works to reduce crime and improve levels of safety in society
by producing data and disseminating knowledge on crime
and crime prevention work.

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Authors: Erik Nilsson, Melai Lekhamo, Daniel Vesterhav, Lars Korsell

Production:
The Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention (Brå)
Box 1386, SE-111 93 Stockholm, Sweden
Tel: +46 (0)8 527 58 400
E-mail: info@bra.se
Brå on the internet: www.bra.se

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Summary

The subject of this report is match-fixing, the manipulation of matches for the purpose of realising winnings on the gambling market. Sporting associations, the gambling industry, the justice system, and the media have paid increasing attention to the phenomenon in recent years. Although the number of suspected cases is still relatively low the consequences may, nevertheless, be serious. Individual teams and athletes are the primary victims of manipulated matches but, in the long run, they can also damage the credibility of the sports movement, cause losses to gambling companies and their customers, and contribute to diminished societal trust in general.

The study is based primarily on a review of documentation of suspected cases of match-fixing from the justice system, Svenska Spel and the Swedish Football Association, as well as interviews with a total of 65 individuals from relevant public authorities, gambling companies, and sports organisations. The focus is on football and basketball, since these are the sports which have been affected. The report provides a first description of match-fixing in Sweden, but since the number of suspected cases is still low and the information regarding them is sparse in many cases, the picture will probably need to be revised as new cases are discovered.

Six types of initiators

The initiators of manipulated matches found in the material have been divided into six different categories for analytical purposes. Three of these categories are within sports, and three affect sports from outside. A seventh type, against whom there are no concrete suspicions but who appears in the material in another way, is also included in the report about the results. The initiators share the characteristic of manipulating matches in order to win on the gambling market. There is nothing which indicates that matches in Sweden are manipulated for other reasons, such as those having to do with the sport itself.

As far as we can determine, the initiative usually comes from individuals outside of sports. In the report, the simplest type of external initiator is called a “sporadic fixer”. The sporadic fixer does not manipulate matches in any systematic way but, instead, bases his or her activities on previous acquaintanceship with athletes.

The bulk of the suspected cases are, however, part of a more systematic setup. Most of these schemes fall within the category which we call “national match-fixing networks” – groups of criminals who also conduct other criminal activities, such as weapon offences and narcotics offences. They work with a diverse and growing network of different types of actors in the sports world. The level of organisation is relatively low and the operations

are highly dependent on which contacts and whose funds can be mobilised when opportunities appear on the gambling market.

There also appear to be more stable and company-like structures (referred to in the report as “economic crime networks”) which reach into club management and which systematically recruit corrupt athletes and fix matches. Match-fixing is one of several types of economic crime in which these actors participate. Money moves between the different parts of the operation and there is reason to believe that revenues from illegal operations partially finance these clubs’ activities in exchange for returns on the gambling market.

Similarly, in respect of initiators within sports, there also exists a range which extends from simple and temporary schemes to those which require more coordination and planning. The “solo fixer” is a person in the sports world who both initiates and implements manipulation of the course of a match. This type of setup requires wagering on individual events within the match which can be affected, relatively simply, by individual athletes, managers, or functionaries. These primarily involve simple match events such as corner kicks or penalty cards in a football match, but there are also situations which the sport is played in such a way that individuals can affect the outcome.

In some cases, it appears that sports actors have banded together to manipulate the outcome of the match. In the report, these initiators are called “the teammates”. Coordination enables greater control over the course of the match, and thereby wagering which is based on a higher degree of certainty and on the more lucrative objects of gambling which are linked to the outcome. It seems likely that this type of manipulation often is based on the tight relationships that can form within a team, but there are also diffuse indications that groups of athletes cooperate across team lines.

There are also cases which seem to have been initiated and controlled by persons in team management – “corrupt management”. This involves, for example, coaches or team managers who, alone or together, exploit their positions in order to stage manipulated matches. Managers have the ability to affect the line-up, recruitment, or other prerequisites for the team’s performance and can also use their power over, for example, salaries, contracts, and selection in order to persuade athletes to underperform.

How matches are manipulated

Most suspected cases of manipulated matches occur within football, from Superettan (Super One division) down to Division 3. There have also been suspicions in respect of matches in the top league within basketball, *Basketligan*.

The conditions under which different functionaries can affect the outcome or the course of a match vary between sports, which can explain the different patterns within football and basketball. For football, the goalies and defensive players are more commonly used, frequently in combination with each other. In basketball, the only individuals who are believed to have manipulated matches are referees.

An important step in this type of offence is recruitment of athletes or functionaries with influence over what happens on the field or court. The study shows that different initiators have, in part, different circumstances enabling recruitment within the sport. While teammates and sporadic fixers often work on the basis of existing relationships, national match-fixing networks work more actively with new recruits. Corrupt management and

economic crimes networks use influence over clubs and their finances in order to recruit corrupt athletes or place them under financial pressure.

The recruitment methods represented in the material range from cronyism and bribery to blackmail, threats, and in extreme cases, even violence. The use of middlemen who use previous acquaintanceship or shared features is common. The relationship often starts with a tentative question for help with “a little problem”, but quickly turns into a blackmail and threat situation.

The material also shows a number of factors which render sports actors particularly interesting to match fixers, or receptive to pressure. These include criminal ties or financial troubles. Interviews with athletes also show how the organisational culture within sports can be vulnerable to corruption.

Gambling forms, bets, and winnings

Match fixers exploit today’s plethora of gambling companies, gambling objects, and gambling forms in order to maximise winnings and minimise the risk of discovery. For most of the suspected Swedish matches, atypical gambling has been registered on the Swedish and/or European and Asian markets. It is also common to combine bets before and during a match, gamble on both sides of different types of match events, and gamble on combinations of manipulated and ordinary matches.

In many cases, match fixers use support functions – lenders, individuals with gambling accounts, and individuals who place bets or collect winnings – on the financial side of the criminality as well. The most organised initiators are also believed to use contacts abroad with avenues into the Asian gambling market.

Proposals for prevention

The proposals for crime prevention strategies which are presented focus primarily on the sports movement, the gambling market, and the justice system, but in certain cases also focus on politicians and decision-makers. Three overall goals permeate the proposals: to support, uphold, and maintain the integrity of the sports movement; to make match-fixing more difficult by reducing structures which present opportunities and by increasing the risk of discovery; and to combat vulnerability factors within sports and the gambling market.

In terms of the sports movement, the primary measure is to enhance and streamline its informational work, as well as to create incentives and structures for reporting suspicions and for participating in investigations. Brå also recommends that strategies for strengthening associations’ integrity and combating mismanagement and corruption be generated, and that monitoring of matches be developed and streamlined.

The proposals for the preventive work which focus on the gambling market are, in part, aimed at decision-makers. Brå believes that it is possible, within the parameters of amended lottery legislation or through dialogue between gambling companies, to restrict wagering to professional level matches with distinct competitive elements and to reduce the offering of match events on which bets may be placed. There is also a proposal directed to the gambling market regarding coordinating the surveillance of odds.

The justice system’s work can also be made more effective. Brå would like to see, among other things, a broader focus in criminal investigations and also raises the issue of whether a review of the criminal law in this area might be justified.

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Brottsförebyggande rådet/National Council for Crime Prevention

BOX 1386/TEGNÉRGATAN 23, SE-111 93 STOCKHOLM, SWEDEN

TELEFON +46 (0)8 527 58 400 • FAX +46 (0)8 411 90 75 • E-POST INFO@BRA.SE • WWW.BRA.SE